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ABSTRACT

This pamphlet provides practical information on using volunteers to lower student/teacher ratios and raise reading and math scores through more individualized instruction during a time of tight district budgets and increased pressure for improved student achievement. The multitude of services which a volunteer program may provide depends upon the needs of the school system, the individual school and the individual teachers, the desire of the school staff and parents for particular volunteer services, and the kinds of professional staff currently available in the schools. Guidelines are provided for establishing a successful program, and recommendations are given for including senior citizen volunteers in such programs. Specific guidelines for tutors are identified, including tips for volunteer tutors, matching student needs with tutor skills, communication between teacher and tutor, and student volunteers as peer tutors. (DST)

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SETTING UP THE SCHOOL VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

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Charlie G. Williams, State Superintendent of Education
May 1985

SETTING UP
THE SCHOOL VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

Dependable, trained volunteers are making significant contributions during a time of tight district budgets and increased pressure for improved student achievement. The use of volunteers provides one of the few no cost/low cost ways to lower student/teacher ratio and raise reading and math scores through more individualized instruction.

School volunteer programs vary greatly depending on specific needs of individual schools and school staff. Volunteers work with children individually and in small groups in classrooms, the library, and special programs. In organized programs, volunteers are recruited, trained, and placed in classrooms or other areas by skilled volunteer coordinators.

School volunteer programs involve community members from all walks of life. They may be students, parents, senior citizens, business employees and other community members. Volunteers usually contribute their time and services because they are concerned about children and the learning process and are interested in helping to improve school programs. They may attain a profound sense of fulfillment through their contributions, in addition to excellent employment experience and training for future work.

The multitude of services which a volunteer program may provide depends upon: the needs of the school system, the individual school and the individual teachers, the desire of school staff and parents for particular volunteer services, and the kinds of professional staff currently available in the schools. In the past volunteers were frequently occupied with non-instructional duties such as monitoring lunchrooms and playgrounds, taking attendance or lunch money, and helping with field trips. More frequently, they are becoming directly involved in the instructional process as lecturers, teacher assistants, tutors, and storytellers.

Volunteers may make useful contributions in the following and other areas:

- Provide individual help to a student not working well in a classroom situation.
- Assist in the library/media center.
- Assist in science, mathematics, reading, language, and vocational laboratories.
- Tutor individual or small groups of students.
- Assist students who were absent to do make-up work.
- Prepare bulletin boards and displays for the classroom, special meetings, and events.
- Work with individual students in the classroom.

- Duplicate instructional materials.
- Assist in the school office with clerical tasks.

Benefits of a school volunteer program include:

- Increases student achievement.
- Provides more individualized instruction.
- Builds students' and volunteers' self-esteem.
- Strengthens school/community relations.
- Relieves teachers of non-instructional duties.
- Enriches the curriculum.
- Provides for business involvement.
- Provides positive adult models.
- Expands tax dollars.
- Provides for a better understanding of school curriculum.
- Expands parent education.
- Increases adult/student ratio.

In order to establish a successful school volunteer program, the following steps should be followed:

- **Examine needs:** Determine what needs school volunteers can help to resolve.
- **Get written school board support for the volunteer program:** Such proof of support gives the program added prestige in the community and is helpful in talking with teachers.
- **Work with principals to attain the commitment of school staff:** The principal sets the tone for the entire school volunteer program. He or she needs to build enthusiasm and insure that teachers want volunteers and are willing to plan for their activities and the efficient use of their time. The volunteer program effort will not be successful without the commitment of the principal, teachers and other school staff. A meeting should be held with school staff to determine school and classroom needs and how volunteers can help address these needs.
- **Establish ways to recruit volunteers:** Recruit volunteers at retirement centers, churches, colleges, or at PTO, PTA, or civic organizational meetings. Also newspapers, television and radio, brochures, and posters can be used for recruitment.
- **Select a districtwide volunteer coordinator:** This position may be filled by an existing district staff member or supervisor, or may be established as an entirely new position. This person is responsible for working with individual school volunteer programs to coordinate orientation, recognition, and recordkeeping. This position serves as a liaison between the school district office, individual schools, and the community.

- **Select a faculty resource person and school volunteer chairman at each school:** The faculty resource person should be a school curriculum coordinator or other teacher who communicates teacher needs effectively to the volunteer chairman and assists the volunteer chairman in placing volunteers and in presenting volunteer training programs. The volunteer chairman should be an active volunteer who works with the faculty resource person to recruit and interview volunteers, provide orientation, coordinate and schedule volunteer assignments, and evaluate the program. The chairman maintains attendance and registration records.
- **Match volunteers with jobs:** Some parents work best with children, others are more suited to clerical or other behind-the-scenes jobs. Volunteer duties should be suited to the talents of individual volunteers.
- **Set up a system for recording volunteers' hours and kinds of activities:** Use this data to inform the community of the program's achievements and kinds of involvement.
- **Provide training for volunteers:** To be successful in their school work, most volunteers need training. They need an orientation session covering their rights and responsibilities, job descriptions, and an overview of the school system. They also need skill-building workshops on tutoring, working with handicapped students, making learning centers, and working as health room or media center volunteers.
- **Provide in-service training for teachers in the use of volunteers:** Teachers need staff development in improving their communication skills with volunteers, analyzing ways volunteers can assist in the classroom, planning effectively for volunteers' activities, recruitment techniques, providing on-the-job training, and providing suitable recognition.
- **Set up a communications system:** This system should provide for a) meetings for volunteers for discussing their service and learning further about the program; b) regularly published volunteer news in the school district newsletter or newspaper; c) an annual report which reveals to the administration and the community that the program "makes a difference."
- **Set up a comfortable volunteer corner** in the school where volunteers may relax and an area where they may work.

A comprehensive public relations effort is paramount to the success of a school or school district volunteer program. It should promote school and community awareness of the program, help to recruit volunteers, and promote official support. The volunteer coordinator and other district public information staff should advertise the program and promote support through:

- Developing information packets about the program geared to different target audiences who may wish to support the program.
- Designing posters, flyers and brochures to recruit volunteers and build support. Such advertisements may be displayed or distributed in supermarkets, churches, libraries, service stations, restaurants, beauty salons, banks, drug stores.
- Using free public service advertising, as well as keeping news media informed of events in the program.
- Organizing a speaker's bureau to furnish speakers about the program for television and radio, civic groups, and other school and community groups.
- Developing an audiovisual presentation about the program such as a slide tape show or film.
- Publishing an internal newsletter to keep program staff and supports aware of program progress.
- Helping to organize special promotional relations such as car washes, bake sales, dances.

The effective school volunteer program usually achieves four major steps:

1) **Readiness to accept, credit, and use community resources:** Community members need to feel a genuine desire and need for their assistance as volunteers in the school. They need to perceive the importance and responsibilities of their involvement and the beneficial outcome for students and the school.
2) **Successful recruitment of community volunteers:** Cross-sectional representation of the entire community should be sought in effective recruitment techniques for school volunteers. The folowing groups should be tapped: parents, PTO, PTA, civic and professional groups, senior citizens, college and high school students, and the general public.
3) **Assignment of specific objectives, responsibilities, and tasks to each volunteer:** Volunteers vary in the kinds of tasks they are best suited to perform. One volunteer may serve most effectively as a tutor; another may be better suited to clerical tasks.
4) **Orientation and training necessary for community members to perform their assignments adequately:** To serve effectively, volunteers need training to understand the school's organization, philosophy, and mandates and to perceive their role in the school setting.

Schools that have used volunteers report that:

1. Teachers are more relaxed and work more effectively.
2. Two or more adults in a classroom reduce discipline problems and teacher fatigue.

3. Classes run smoother with a higher degree of purposeful activity.
4. Students frequently respond better to a volunteer than to a paraprofessional.

DEVELOPMENT OF PLAN FOR VOLUNTEER TUTORING PROGRAMS

Individual student tutoring is consistently causing improved student achievement, attitudes, and self-concept. Thus, the use of volunteers as tutors is becoming an increasingly popular use of volunteers' time and talents. Students who are being tutored by volunteers are making academic as well as social gains; they are being made to feel special, with improved self-images and attitudes toward school. The personal attention not only helps the student learn, but also shows him (or her) that other people care. In addition, the tutoring experience provides the tutor with a sense of immediate usefulness, frees the teacher to instruct the entire class, and helps to establish a bond between school and community.

Tutors provide a variety of teaching services, including: helping children on a one-to-one basis, supervising a small group working on a common lesson, administering and correcting tests, reading to a child and helping him understand, helping the child develop a new skill, and reassuring the child who has difficulty learning.

Volunteer tutoring can be a most rewarding experience. Tutors usually experience an improved self-image from helping someone else, a feeling of worthwhile use of their time, an increased motivation for learning new skills, a welcome change from housework or other routines, a stimulation from having a stake in the success and well-being of another person.

The following steps are recommended for setting up a volunteer tutorial program:

- A need should be identified for individualized tutoring as perceived by students, teachers, administrators, and community people. This need may be identified through informal discussion or more formal techniques such as surveys.
- Teachers, administrators, volunteers, and parents should be involved in the development of goals for the tutoring program.
- A committee of teachers and parents should be set up to inform the community of the program.
- Goals for the program should focus first on the student:
  - To give students the individualized attention which schools on their own cannot furnish.
  - To help students strengthen skills and subject matter deficiencies and experience success in deficient areas.
  - To help students enhance self-confidence and self-esteem.
- Goals should focus second on the tutor:
  - To strengthen tutor's ability to analyze learning styles and diagnose learning problems.
  - To develop tutor skills in motivating learners.

- To enhance tutor's self-confidence, self-esteem, and personal growth through successful teaching experience with students.
- To give the tutor a personal interest in the educational process.

- Responsibilities for the tutor may include:
  - Regularly tutoring a student whose needs have been matched with strengths of the tutor.
  - Meeting every tutoring session, or reporting if unable to attend.
  - Working with the teacher through weekly conferences to diagnose the student's learning problem and plan learning strategies.
  - Establishing objectives to meet the identified learner needs and informing the student of these objectives.
  - Learning the student's interests to build rapport and to use materials suited to these interests.
  - Planning carefully for each tutoring session and gearing the strategy to the student's needs. Some tutors may even choose to design a manual for each student.
  - Adding interest to learning activities through games and direct student involvement.
  - Ensuring that learning media and materials match the student's learning style.
  - Making learning activity directions clear.
  - Departing from the lesson plan if another direction is needed.
  - Evaluating student progress through written and verbal testing and maintaining a daily journal on each student.
  - Participating in training seminars.
  - Fostering the students self-confidence and self-esteem.
  - Maintaining flexibility and developing creativity.
  - Ensuring some success and praising progress, however small.
  - Being patient, even if progress is small.
- Administrators for the tutoring program should set up:
  - An efficient referral and placement system which assigns tutors to students in the same classroom so that each tutor relates to one teacher and works with one grade level. Volunteers should be placed at the request of a teacher in a school receptive to volunteers.
  - A system for monitoring tutor's reliability in meeting with students.
  - A means to assist tutors with transportation problems.
  - A system for providing on-the-job training by teachers in tutoring techniques. A preconference should be arranged between tutor and supervising teacher. The volunteer tutor might also observe a basic skills lesson given by the teacher to the class with whom the volunteer will work. Any training sessions should be practical and avoid technical jargon.

- A system for recruiting high school and high achieving elementary students as peer tutors for elementary students.
- A system for testing each student before and after the volunteer tutors him, then sharing test results with the tutor.
- A materials center or area developed exclusively for the use of tutors. Storing these materials in a special location allows tutors to function on their own without disrupting classroom routines to borrow materials.

- Setting up policy is very important for volunteer tutors. Requirements for volunteer tutors may include:
  - Promptness and regular attendance.
  - Maintaining confidentiality of students.
  - Signing in and out on Volunteer Attendance Sheet.
  - Tutoring inside the regular classroom as a supplement and reinforcement, not as a teacher replacement.

The district level coordinator should work with the district public relations director to promote community and school level awareness of the program, recruit volunteers, and promote official support. This public relations effort should follow along the lines of publicity efforts for general volunteer programs.

Tips for Volunteer Tutors

Volunteer tutors should be given tips for tutoring such as:

- Setting specific, realistic goals to determine exactly what is expected from the tutoring within a specific time frame.
- Ensuring that each tutoring session begins and ends with a successful experience for the child.
- Keeping tutoring sessons short, with 15 minutes a day for elementary and 30 minutes a day for high school students.
- Limiting the material to be covered, so as not to frustrate the child being tutored with too much material.
- Using novelty in tutoring, avoiding ruts and finding new ways to repeat material.
- Keeping a tutoring log of brief (or lengthy) impressions of each tutoring session, which are useful in meeting with the teacher to modify the tutoring program.
- Praising for efforts as well as accomplishments to ensure a positive attitude even if there is not immediate success.
- Encouraging motor responses with tutoring; e.g. have child to write answers to flashcard drills on laminated cards.
- Keeping the child's mind on his task and not allowing digressions from the tutoring.
- Tutoring at an appropriate level of difficulty; this level of difficulty should be discussed with the child's teacher.

- Evaluating learning games carefully; educational games can be motivating, but should be evaluated for efficiency. If too much time is taken up setting up the game and explaining the rules, there is little time left for teaching.

Matching Student Needs with Tutor Skills

In order to place tutors by matching student needs with tutors' skills and interests, the school tutor coordinator should be able to draw on a referral file containing student academic needs profiles and corresponding profiles on tutor strengths and interests. The student needs profiles should list student's age, grade level, academic strengths, and specific subject area problems or skill weaknesses. Student profiles may also list subject area qualifications required of the tutor, student preferences for tutor's sex and age level, and times when the student can work with the tutor.

Corresponding information should be listed in each tutor profile. Student skill and subject area weaknesses can then be matched with tutor skill and subject area strengths. The tutor coordinator may make this match or the actual tutor may choose the student(s) profile(s) most suited to his or her strenghts. Tutors wishing to work with emotionally disturbed, mentally retarded, or disadvantaged students usually need to be specially interviewed.

Communication Between Teacher and Tutor

Because the teacher is ultimately responsible for the student's learning progress, the teacher and tutor need to work well together to adequately meet learner needs. The experience and judgment of the teacher is a resource to the tutor, while the time and energy of his tutor is a mutual resource to the teacher. The teacher and tutor should discuss the tutoring assignment, including:

- Determining students' needs.
- Identifying home situations or emotional difficulties which the tutor should be aware of.
- Identifying resources and materials available for use in tutoring sessions. Resources may include the principal, counselor, reading specialist, librarian, and instructional materials center director.
- Setting regular meetings for planning and reviewing student progress, including discussing results of specific tutoring activities.

Student Volunteers as Peer Tutors

The use of student volunteers as peer tutors has been successfully operating in schools for over two decades. The peer tutoring program has been shown to reap benefits for tutor, tutee, and teacher. Self con-

cept of tutors is enhanced, along with their academic skills. Tutees benefit from the individual attention they would not otherwise receive. Both tutors and tutees reflect increased motivation and improved attitudes toward school and learning. Teachers have time they would not have otherwise to work with those who most need help.

The ultimate responsibility for a successful peer tutoring program depends upon the teacher's direction. The teacher determines the existence, type, and duration of the peer activity. To set up a peer tutoring program, the teacher should decide whether each activity or material is suited to peer teaching through these criteria:

(1) Does the task lend itself to drill and practice?
(2) Does the task involve direct participation of tutor and learner?
(3) Does the task lend itself to clear directions?

Ages of students, ability levels, and amount of time to be allotted should be considered in setting up activities. Appropriate activities to be carried out through peer tutoring include:

- Drilling with flashcards, words lists, textbooks, workbooks, or Dit-to sheets.
- Playing learning games.
- Dictating spelling words.
- Locating answers to questions that require research.
- Studying for a quiz or assignment.
- Discussing ideas introduced in a lesson.

The selection process for choosing students who are appropriate to serve as peer tutors and as tutees is a very important one. Students selected to be peer tutors should:

- Exhibit helping behaviors in informal situations.
- Be well liked by their classmates.
- Demonstrate leadership ability, regular attendance, and mature behavior.
- Demonstrate higher than average academic skills.

Students selected to be tutored should:

- Demonstrate willingness to be helped.
- Need extra practice in a specific area.
- Want to make up missed work.

Once selected, tutors and tutees should be matched by their suitabilities for working well together. In order to give those students being tutored genuine understanding and individual attention, the peer tutor should be trained in giving directions, confirming correct responses, applying positive corrections, praising tutees, gathering instructional material, recording student performance, monitoring progress, and communicating with teachers.

Benefits to the Community

In addition to benefits to the student, school and the individual tutor, the community also reaps benefits from the tutorial program. The volunteer tutorial program helps the community by:

- Saving school funds and thus taxes.
- Establishing learning situations otherwise not possible.
- Establishing good relations between school and community.
- Assisting teachers to better understand students and parents of that community.

USING SENIOR CITIZENS IN THE SCHOOL VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

Most retired citizens are still vigorous, energetic, and wish to remain active and in touch with their communities through such avenues as volunteer work. The contribution of older school volunteers in the classroom is believed to positively affect student attitudes, learning, behavior and even school attendance. The natural attraction and affection which many senior citizens have for children causes them to be loving classroom volunteers and genuine school enthusiastics.

They bring to the classroom years of experience in a multitude of careers. Often these older citizens even serve as substitute grandparents for children who live far from their own grandparents. They supply these children values and traditions which they cannot receive directly from their true long-distance grandparents.

There are other special advantages of using older citizens in the volunteer program:

- The senior citizen volunteer, unlike some parent volunteers, has not chosen to be a volunteer because his child attends the school; rather he is there because he loves children and wants to help them.
- The older volunteer is usually exremely dependable; many consider it a second career and even ask for summer placement.
- The older volunteer brings wisdom, patience, and enthusiasm to his tasks.

There are benefits as well for the older volunteers themselves. Having led busy and productive lives, they need to enjoy a continued:

- opportunity to contribute to society.
- sense of accomplishment.
- recognition for their contribution.
- outlet for their creativity.
- sense of responsibility.
- satisfaction of needs for their personal growth.
- interaction with others in a stimulating environment.

Senior citizens have talents, skills, time, knowledge, and compassion which can be redirected and channeled. They are able to satisfy many of these needs by serving as classroom volunteers.

A bond of open communication is needed between the senior citizen volunteers, teachers and Senior Citizen Volunteer Project Coordinator. Older volunteers, especially, need to know their help is needed, their placement is suited to their talents, and their time is well used. Frequently, the self-concept of the older adults has been affected by common

stereotypes related to aging and to older persons. The result is a reluctance to volunteer for work in school programs, other than tutoring. Willingness to tutor is limited to those few with confidence in their academic background. The volunteer coordinator needs to be aware that they may have the problem of helping the older adults to recognize their own skills, the value of their relationship with the students and their abilities to interact with children and youth productively. They also need community recognition for their efforts — for example, a public relations campaign through the media or other means to build community awareness of older volunteer's contributions.

Setting up the school volunteer program for senior citizens might include the following steps:

- **Start small:** Solid success with a few senior citizens is the best foundation on which to build.
- **Evaluate teacher response:** Ensure that the program is responsive to teacher needs since the purpose of the project is to support teacher's efforts. Information on projects involving senior citizens as volunteers in the school is available through the State Department of Education.
- **Prepare a program outline with staff:** Work with principal and teachers to outline a program which meshes with the curriculum.
- **Prepare a program support system:** Involve your PTO/PTA board in planning this program. Funding for projects, community support and publicity are key factors in developing a successful program.
- **Prepare a program format:** Include days and times for senior citizens to participate as volunteers.
- **Select a coordinator for Senior Citizens Project:** This person is responsible for recruiting senior citizens and coordinating their activities at school. This should be a person who understands the talents as well as the apprehensions and concerns of elderly persons. A woman in her middle years, 40-45 + , who may be looking at a second career adds a special touch to make your program intergenerational. Some training in gerontology is extremely helpful for the selected coordinator. Funds are available through the S.C. Commission on Aging to attend the Summer School of Gerontology. For information on other available training contact the State Department of Education.
- **Prepare trainings:** Staff, parent volunteers, and students need to be prepared for working with volunteers, especially older adults. The attitudes and knowledge you have about your own aging process and older adults will affect your program's success. A minimum amount of training can be provided through the use of community resources. Contact your State Department of Education for information. A film entitled "Close Harmony" is excellent for use with students.
- **Present the idea to senior citizens:** Recruit senior citizens for the

volunteer program at meetings of groups of retired citizens, such as the American Association of Retired Persons and various senior citizens clubs. Present to them positive insights into the program: the worthy service they will provide the community and the direct impact they will have on education and students. Invite them to learn further about the program by attending an orientation meeting. Get names, addresses, and telephone numbers of recruits.

- **Send written invitations** to senior citizen recruits reminding them of the orientation meeting for senior citizen volunteers. These reminders should be brief, clear, and printed in extra-large type. Follow up these reminders with telephone calls to each recruit.
- **Hold orientation meeting for program in the school:** Meeting should be simple and in the morning, the most convenient time for most senior citizens. Present project goals and answer questions. Give them the opportunity to talk with teachers about the program, to tour classrooms, meet some students, and to feel at home. Provide sample job descriptions for older volunteers to choose from. These should be clear and simple yet detailed enough to give a clear picture of what is expected of the volunteer. A volunteer handbook can serve as a good working tool.
- **Sign the senior citizens up as volunteers:** Match your volunteer with the job. Use the older adult's talents and skills by providing choice in jobs, not just busy work. Screening your volunteers is very important. Tutorial work is not for everyone. Values may be shared along with information and skills. Many older adults are rich resources of information. Creative activity which reinforces the curriculum is enriching and developmental. Older adults frequently enjoy working teams of two. Visiting a project or observing other volunteers in action helps to put the volunteer at ease and does away with real fears.
- **Provide door-to-door transportation** for those senior citizens who need it through such avenues as public transportation or a minibus donated by the community. (A local business or industry might provide the funds to cover cost of transportation.) Retired Senior Volunteer Program (R.S.V.P) or PTO/PTA organizations can provide assistance with transportation.
- **Help staff and students to establish rapport with retired citizens** through reading and discussion. Discussion should address the advantages and liabilities of age and might center on grandparents and other aged friends and relatives. The hostility which some adults and children display towards the elderly might be beneficially discussed. A good coordinator for these discussions might be a geriatrics specialist, doctor, social worker, or retirement center director. Reading material to be suggeted might include: **Annie and the Old**

One, by Miska Miles; **William's Doll**, by Charlotte Zolotow; **Mandy's Grandmother**, by L. M. Skorpen; **Grandfather and I**, by Helen E. Buckley; **My Very Special Friend**, by Lucille Hein; **How Does It Feel to be Old?**, by Norma Farber; **Through Grandpa's Eyes**, by Rose Blue; and **My Grandmother Would Rock Quietly and Hum**, by Libby Stopple. The film "Close Harmony" is excellent preparation for setting overall positive program tone. The film "What We Have" is stimulating for faculty and helpful in recruiting older adults. Older adults enjoy both films.

- **Provide Space:** The space needed for older volunteer activities should be comfortable, attractive and suited to activity. Small group or laboratory type setting provides a comfortable learning atmosphere. Storage space is needed for supplies. How adequate these provisons are is a message to students about the school's support for this intergenerational experience. Scheduling of activity and space is very important to older volunteers. If it is inadequate and inconsistent, older adults drop out quickly. A positive program involving older adults necessitates proper prior planning.

The special talents, interests, expertise, and knowledge of senior citizens can be used as a significant asset in classrooms; they may contribute as:

- Tutors in reading and math
- Resource persons, e.g. speakers
- Storytellers
- Small group teaching
- Enrichment projects related to curriculum
- Crafts which reinforce other skills

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Charlie G. Williams, State Superintendent of Education
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